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# Errors Made by the Students at the Departments of English and Arabic in Acronyms: A Contrastive Study

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# 1 Introduction

Acronymy is one of the important processes of word formation. It has been used on a wide scale in English and Arabic nowadays. The problem of the study is that the students at the Department of English cannot produce acronyms or discern their origins. On the other hand, the students at the Department of Arabic do not have this phenomenon in their textbooks because Arab linguists deem this process to be borrowed from foreign languages and thus it must not be studied in spite of the fact that they are being used in the language.

This study aims at:

1- Investigating acronyms in English and Arabic so as to make a comparison between the two languages.

2-Identifying and analyzing the errors in which the students at the Departments of English and Arabic are liable to make in using acronyms.

3- Finding out the reasons behind their errors.

It is hypothesized that:

1- Arab linguists believe that acronyms are not found in Standard Arabic. As such, they have not been extensively studied unlike English.

2- Students at the Department of English are unable to identify the original words from which the acronyms are constructed.

3- The achievement of the students at the Department of English in constructing acronyms is better than producing the original words of the acronyms.

4- Students at the Department of Arabic are incapable of recognizing the original words from which the acronyms are constructed.

5- They are bad at producing acronyms.

6- The performance of the students at the Department of English is better than the performance of the students at the Department of Arabic.

The procedures adopted consist of the following steps:

1- Producing an explanation about acronyms in English and Arabic depending on the literature in this field so as to state the similarities and the differences between the two languages.
2- Applying a test to a number of students at the second year so as to find out the difficulties they face in employing this process.
3- Analyzing and tabulating the data of the test on the basis of which conclusions are presented.

This study is limited to a hundred Iraqi EFL university students at the second year at the Department of English as well as a hundred students at the second year at the Department of Arabic, College of Education, University of Babylon in the academic year 2008-2009. The students at the Department of English have just studied this topic in the second year.

## 2 Acronyms in English

### 2.1 Etymology and History

Abbreviations, one of the most noticeable features of present-day English linguistic life would form a major part of any super dictionary.

In 1943, acronym is coined from Greek *akros* (which means 'tip') and *onyma* (which means 'name'), by analogy with *homonym*. In fact, the British were the first to unearth the joys of creating acronyms even though the learnt word to designate what is essentially a letters game was born in America (Pyles, 1971: 300).

The fashion for abbreviations, which is often thought to be an exclusively modern habit, can be traced back to over 150 years and the

fashionable use of acronyms comes and goes in waves. Nevertheless, in the present century, there has been a great increase in the use of acronyms (Crystal, 2004: 120).

## 2.2 Definitions

Most linguists define an acronym as a word formed from the initial letters of a group of words (Lester, 1991: 406; Crystal, 2003: 1 and Fromkin et al., 2003: 95). Allan (1986: 241) and Kleinedler (1993:iii) state that acronyms are created from the initial letter(s) or two of the words in a multiword (compound) name. Bauer (1983: 237) substitutes the phrase "group of words" with "principal words in a title or phrase", whereas Pyles (1971: 299) mentions that acronyms are sometimes made of syllables. A different opinion is given by Smith (2002: 154) who declares that an acronym might be formed from using one's imagination.

## 2.3 Acronyms and Abbreviations

The term 'abbreviation' includes acronyms, blends, and clippings. A blend is, in its general sense, the combination of the beginning of one word and the end of another, such as **caplet** from ***capsule*** and ***tablet***. The process of clipping is the shortening of a polysyllabic word by omitting part of the word's ending, such as **exams** from ***examinations*** (Kleinedler, 1993: iv).

Actually, abbreviation refers to any shortened form of a word or a phrase; some have used initialism or alphabetism to refer to an abbreviation formed simply from a string of initials. Thus, acronyms and initialisms are deemed to be part of the process of abbreviation (Wikipedia, 2009 a: 2). On the one hand, Stageberg (1981: 123); Quirk et al. (1985: 1581-2); and Yule (2006:57) believe that acronyms can be divided into initialisms, such as **CIA** (**C**entral **I**ntelligence **A**gency) and those that are articulated as a word, such

as **radar** (**ra**dio **d**etecting **a**nd **r**anging). This is the way the researchers treated it in this paper.

On the other hand, Gramley and Pätzold (1992: 27) and Crystal (2004: 120) think that acronyms and abbreviations can be subsumed under initialisms. In a word, acronymy is a controversial concept because there is no universal agreement on the precise definition of the various terms (abbreviation, initialism, and acronym) used in word formation, nor on written usage.

## 2.4 Formation of Acronyms

Acronyms mostly consist of three letters (usually all capital), more intensively, acronyms may be built on acronyms. For instance, **PROM** (**p**rogrammable **r**ead-**o**nly **m**emory) is built on **ROM** (**r**ead-**o**nly **m**emory) and **EPROM (e**rasable **p**rogrammable **r**ead-**o**nly **m**emory**)** is created from **PROM** (Fromkin et al. 2003: 96).

An acronym can also be formed from the first letters of the syllables in long polysyllabic words, (e.g. **PABA** (**p**ara**a**mino**b**enzoic **a**cid) (Kleinedler, 1993: iv). There is no agreement on what to call acronyms whose enunciation involves the combination of letter names and words, such as **JPEG** [dʒeɪpəg] and **MS-DOS** [əməsdɔs].

In some cases, the name of a particular object is chosen to form the acronym and it spells something that sounds metaphorically right, for example, **BASIC** (**b**eginner **a**ll-purpose **s**ymbolic **i**nstruction **c**ode); **WASP** (**W**hite **A**nglo-**S**axon **P**rotestant); and **FIST** (The **F**ederation of **I**nter-**S**tate **T**ruckers) (Bauer, 1983: 237). Thus, the lack of predictability in acronyms is because of two reasons. Firstly, the original phrase is treated freely to form

the acronym. Secondly, not every acronym is enunciated as one word (ibid.: 237-8). Sometimes, acronyms like **ATM** (**a**utomatic **t**eller **m**achine) and **PIN** (**p**ersonal **i**dentification **n**umber), are regularly written with one of their elements repeated, as in "*I sometimes forget my **PIN number** when I go to the **ATM machine***" (Yule, 2006: 57).

Occasionally, unusual acronyms are written in a way that the letters are not the initial ones in the phrase, e.g. KREEP (a type of moonrock, were the **K** is the chemical symbol for potassium, and the acronym means **p**otassium, **r**are **e**arth **e**lements, **p**hosphate). In more common cases, more than one letter is taken from the beginning of one or more of the words in the original phrase, as in **Arvin** (**A**rmy of the **R**epublic of **Vi**et**n**am) and **GHOST** (**G**lobal **H**orizontal **S**ounding **T**echnique) (Bauer, 1983: 238).

## 2.5 Uses of Acronyms

Acronyms belong to fields such as chemistry, health, transport, the military, computer, and education (Gramley and Pätzold, 1992: 27). Additionally, they tend to abound in large organizations in which they express long and cumbersome terms, as in **MADD** (**m**other **a**gainst **d**runk **d**riving) and **NATO** (Yule, 2006: 57). In addition, the various types of acronyms have been used most remarkably in the Internet, e.g., **BBC**, **FAQ**, **AOL**, **IMB**, and **IRC** (Crystal, 2004: 429).

The use of acronyms for trade names has been established for a long time. Some cites are **Reo** (automobile, made by the **R. E. O**lds Company), **sebco** (extension drill, made by the **S**tar **e**xpansion and **B**olt **Co**mpany) (Pyles, 1971: 301).

## 2.6 Reasons for Using Acronyms

Usually, the motive for creating acronyms is either brevity or catchiness in both speech and writing (Hartmann and Stork, 1976:1). Additionally, euphemism may be one of the reasons, for example, **BO** (**b**ranch **o**ffice), **TB** (**t**u**b**erculosis), and **VD** (**v**enereal **d**isease) (Pyles, 1971: 299). Accordingly, succinctness and precision are highly valued and acronyms can contribute greatly to concise style. Furthermore, acronyms help to convey a sense of social identity, i.e., the group to which it belongs. So it wastes time and space if such acronym are stated fully and it would be strange indeed to hear someone routinely expanding **USA**, **AIDS**, **UNESCO**, **SARS**, **ROM**, **DOS**, **RAM** and all the other well-known acronyms of contemporary English (Crystal, 2004: 120).

Acronyms are being added to lexicon daily because of the wide-spread of the Internet and proliferation of computers. Examples of recent acronyms are **MORF** (**m**ale **or** **f**emale), **FAQ** (**f**requently **a**sked **q**uestions), **WYSIWYG** (**w**hat **y**ou **s**ee **i**s **w**hat **y**ou **g**et), **FYI** (**f**or **y**our **i**nformation), and **BTW** (**b**y **t**he **w**ay) (Fromkin et al. 2003: 96-7). Actually, even if the acronyms are proper names, they have to be entered in the dictionary. They cannot be left to have their meanings decided from the original phrases (Allan, 1986: 241).

## 2.7 Punctuation

Usually, acronyms (especially of organizations) are written without full stops even though in American English they do (Swan, 2003: 2 and Lester, 1991: 358). Each letter is an abbreviation of a separate word and, in theory, should get its own termination mark. Yet such punctuation is

diminishing with the belief that the presence of all-capital letters is sufficient to indicate that the word is an acronym.

An apostrophe is sometimes used before the ***s*** in plurals of acronyms (as in **MP's**, **CD's**, **IRA's**) (Watkins et al. 2001: 280). As mentioned earlier, most acronyms are written with capital letters, but some of them have become regular English words and thus are written with small ones, as in **radar** and **laser**. However, some rare cases are **e.g.** (for example, taken from the Latin **e**xempli **g**ratia), **i.e.** (that is, from the Latin **i**d **e**st), and **etc.** (and so on, from the Latin **et** **c**etera) (Kleinedler, 1993: v-vi).

Articles are frequently dropped in acronyms, as in **UNESCO** (and not ***the*** **UNESCO**) (Alexander, 2002: 65). The new technique of using small caps is sometimes used in order to make the run of capital letters seem less jarring to the reader. For example, the style of some American publications, including the *Atlantic Monthly* and *USA Today*, is to use small caps for acronyms longer than three letters; thus **U.S.** and **FDR** are in normal caps, but NATO in small caps. The acronyms **AD** and **BC** are often written as small capped as well (Wikipedia, 2009 a: 10).

As for numbers (both cardinal and ordinal) in names, they are often represented by digits rather than initial letters: as in **4GL** (***F***ourth ***g***eneration ***l***anguage) or **G77** (**G**roup of **77**). Large numbers may use metric prefixes, as with **Y2K** (for Year 2000) (sometimes written **Y2k**, because the SI symbol for 1000 is ***k*** - not ***K***, which stands for *kelvin*). Exceptions using initials for numbers include **TLA** (**t**hree-**l**etter **a**cronym/**a**bbreviation) and **GoF** (**G**ang **o**f **F**our). Acronyms that use numbers for other purposes include repetitions, such as **W3C** (**W**orld **W**ide **W**eb **C**onsortium); pronunciation, such as **B2B** (**b**usiness **to** **b**usiness); and what is called 'numeronyms', such as **i18n**

(**i**nternationalizatio**n**; **18** represents the 18 letters between the initial **i** and the final **n**) (ibid.: 11).

## 2.8 Meaning

Acronyms can be exploited to affect a double meaning, e.g. the **W**omen **A**gainst **R**ape organization uses the acronym **WAR** to convey their militancy (Allan, 1986: 241). As a matter of fact, many acronyms are used and understood in a particular field and cannot be used or assimilated easily outside it, whereas other obtained general currency (Stageberg, 1981: 124).

In some cases, the estimated meaning of the acronym has no relation to its form, e.g. **NEGRO** (**N**ational **E**conomic **G**rowth and **R**econstruction **O**rganization) and **NOW** (**N**ational **O**rganization of **W**omen) (Pyles, 1971: 300).

# 3 Acronyms in Arabic

## 3.1 History and Definition

In Arabic, acronym is known as (اللفظة الاوائلية) which means an abbreviation of a set of words to syllables or letters so as to make a word that is entirely new. As a result, the new created word is easier in memorization, reading and writing (Wikipedia, 2009 b: 2). The original words from which the acronyms are created are usually the principal one(s).

حجازي(2000: 95-6) states that acronyms have been used in the past in the Arabic language. Some well-known linguists have mentioned them in the Arabic heritage. In addition, they have collected the acronyms from the ancient manuscripts and showed their meanings to the modern readers. Some of these acronyms are (اهـ) from (انتهى), (رمبم) from (موسى بن ميمون)، and (الخ) from (إلى أخره).

As such, with the passage of time a good amount of acronyms appeared in the middle ages and as a consequence nowadays specialized dictionaries have been written because of the increase in their number and usage (ibid.)

### 3.2 Acronyms and Abbreviations

The process of abbreviation involves shortening words, phrases, and sentences by omitting and/or changing their letters in a way that meaning will remain clear. In Arabic, blending (النحت), clipping (الاجتزاز), and acronymy (اللفظة الاوائلية) are all part of the process of abbreviation. The first process, i.e. blending is very identified in the Arabic language and it includes terms that have been used in ancient references. Blends that are frequently cited in these books are: السبحلة = سبحان الله, السمعلة = سلام عليكم , زمان ومكان = زمكان, لاحول ولا قوة إلا بالله = الحوقلة, بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم =البسملة, لا اله إلا الله =الهيللة (245: 2005, جبل; 28-9: 2005, عبد الحميد; 24: , الخوارزمي).

Concerning the second process which is clipping, it is made either at the beginning of a word, namely, the initial letters, as in (ذا) from (هذا), (عل) from (لعل), or at the end of the word, e.g. (تا) from (تلك), (ذا) from (ذلك) (490: 1995, سعيد). Furthermore, the clipped part might occur in the middle such as (مذ) from (منذ) (Wright, 1971: 22), and (صبح) from (صباح) (160: 1996, منصور).

Actually, some writers use the term (أشراع), which means initialism, to refer to the acronyms that are pronounced letter by letter as in ذ.م.م. ( ذات مسؤولية محدودة) and they use the term (اللفظة الاوائلية) to refer to acronyms that are pronounced as a word, like حدس(الحركة الدستورية الإسلامية) (Wikipedia, 2009 c: 1).

Essentially, initialism in Arabic is governed by accurate rules, whereas acronymy is not. Acronymy is constructed following the aim of easiness in enunciation

## 3.3 Formation of Acronyms

In Arabic, the letters that form the acronym, especially the one that is not pronounced as a word (i.e., initialisms) are taken from the base form of the original words in order not to have additional letters like (الميم, التاء ,الألف ) in the acronym. On the other hand, the other type of acronyms, which are enunciated as a word, is not governed by specific rules. In fact, these acronyms are formed according to easiness in usage and articulation (Wikipedia, 2009 c: 1).

Usually the acronym is formed by picking up the first letter or two from the original complete Arabic word. In some cases, especially in scientific realms, markings and numbers are used in the acronyms as in the symbols and numbers used in mathematics e.g. نق from نصف القطر, and و.هـ. م. from وهو المطلوب, electricity system in geometry, chemical and physical equations e.g. قم from القوة المركزية, and كغم from كيلوغرام, botany and astronomy. Furthermore, they are used in modern linguistics and Morse code (97: 2000, حجازي).

Acronyms in Arabic are sometimes created from the first letters in the syllables of the original word(s), e.g. ا هـ from انتهى. Unlike the English language, the acronym is written as separate letters when it is not pronounced as a full word in Arabic. In addition, some letters may be added to the acronym so as to make it metaphorically right, i.e. it resembles a word in Arabic; a clear example is مشمش from المنظمة الشيوعية المصرية (ibid.).

## 3.4 Importance of Using Acronyms

Firstly, acronymy provides time owing to not writing full words. Secondly, it offers space in printing because full phrases and/or sentences are represented by individual letters. Thirdly, acronyms are used in order to have better comprehension of the original sentence or phrase. Fourthly, because some acronyms are used around the world, they become well-known in all of the global languages (97: 2000, حجازي).

As a matter of fact, acronymy has become a fundamental component in modern languages on science technology and media levels. Additionally, the increase in the industrial products requires the usage of short words and symbols that lead to the creation of specialized dictionary in some foreign languages (ibid.: 96).

Moreover, some of the names of famous authors, scientists, and linguists have been abbreviated into acronyms in Arabic, such as حج (ابن حجر الهيثمي), مر (محمد الرملي), and ع ش (علي الشبراملسي), (Wright, 1971: 294). Acronyms are popular in the names of political parties and movements, for instance, حيد (حركة اليسار الديمقراطي), أمل(أفواج المقاومة اللبنانية), and حماس (حركة المقاومة الإسلامية) (Wikipedia, 2009 c: 2-3).

## 3.5 Borrowed Acronyms

Arabic has two types of borrowed acronyms:

**1-Untranslated Borrowed Acronyms**:

In English some acronyms have been formed and used in media world, as a consequence, have entered the Arabic language as they are in English, as in كوميسا(COMESA = ***C***ommon ***M***arket for ***E***astern and ***S***outhern ***A***frica), جات (GATT = ***G***eneral ***A***greement on ***T***ariffs and ***T***rade), رادار (radar = ***ra***dio ***d***etecting ***a***nd ***r***anging), بيسك (BASIC= ***B***eginners' ***A***ll-purpose

***S***ymbolic ***I***nstruction ***C***ode), ليزر (Laser= ***L***ight ***a***mplification by ***s***timulated ***e***mission of ***r***adiation), and كوبول (COBOL= ***Co***mmon ***B***usiness ***O***riented ***L***anguage) (Al-Jarf, 2009: 3).

Some acronyms that refer to prominent news agency have been also borrowed as they are, for example, سي أن أن (CNN= ***C***able ***N***ews ***N***etwork) (ibid.).

**2- Translated Borrowed Acronyms:**

In Arabic, the component of some borrowed acronyms, especially acronyms used for scientific degrees are translated and used in their full forms rather than using their acronyms, e.g. EMS (***E***uropean ***M***onetary ***S***ystem) which is translated into (نظام النقد الأوربي). IMF (***I***nternational ***M***onetary ***F***und), which is translated into (صندوق النقد الدولي) (Wikipedia, 2009 b:18).

Some exceptions are تدمك (ISBN= ***I***nternational ***S***tandard ***B***ibliographic ***N***umber) that is translated into (الترقيم الدولي الموحد للكتب), and أ ش إ (= أنباء الشرق الأوسط), (MENA= ***M***iddle ***E***ast ***N***ews ***A***gency), whereas وفا (وكالة الأنباء الفلسطينية) has no acronym in English (102:2000, حجازي).

News agencies have their names in Arabic in addition to their translated names in English with their acronyms. For instance, هيئة إذاعة الشرق الأوسط (MBC= ***M***iddle East ***B***roadcasting ***C***orporation), and وكالة الأنباء الكويتية (KUNA= ***Ku***wait ***N***ews ***A***gency) (Wikipedia, 2008: 2).

## 3.6 Punctuation

The letters that form the acronyms in the Arabic language are written separately with or without the use of dots, mostly so as to differentiate pronouncing them letter by letter from pronouncing them as full words. For

example, unlike ص.ب (صندوق بريد), واس (وكالة الأنباء السعودية) is pronounced as a word (122: 1996, منصور).

In order to discriminate between the plural and singular, male and female forms of acronyms in Arabic, the use of vowel points (الحركات) is done (Wikipedia, 2009 c: 1-2).

### 3.7 Meaning

Some instances of acronymy in the Arabic language are constructed conversely so that they give acceptable and preferable meaning in the society, e.g. فتح (حركة التحرير الفلسطينية) which is converted from حتف which means 'death' to فتح which means 'to set free'. Another important case is دعم (منظمة العمل الديمقراطي) which is written in a reversed way in an attempt to give an encouraging meaning that indicates the original one (Wikipedia, 2009 b: 3).

### 3.8 Attempt of Arabization

Many attempts of Arabization are being made by writers of books in various areas of life, more specifically on the internet because of the following reasons: (1) most of the acronyms are borrowed as they are from English as a consequence of considering English as the language of science, (2) there are few Arabic acronyms in comparison with English, and (3) the increase need for abbreviated forms in writing on the Net due to the huge development in all of the scientific fields (1 : 2009،النجار).

## 4 Comparison Between English and Arabic

1. The rapid advance of science and technology in recent centuries seems to be an underlying force driving the usage of acronyms, as new inventions and concepts with multiword names create a demand for shorter, more manageable names. Thus, what many Arab linguists believe (that

acronyms are not of that significance, they can be neglected, and as a consequence there is no need for using them in Arabic) is not true. As such, there are not many dictionaries of acronyms in Arabic like English.

2. In English, acronyms are not usually written with full stops (even though in American English they do), whilst in Arabic they usually put full stops.
3. In Arabic, some acronyms have been borrowed from more than one resource, mostly from English and French. This is why one may find two acronyms that mean the same thing as in إيدز and سيدا and ناتو and اوتان.
4. The letters that shape the acronym in the Arabic language, especially initialisms, are taken from the base form of the original words.
5. Acronyms have not been studied or written about thoroughly in Arabic, whereas they have attracted the attention of many linguists in English especially in the present time.
6. Some of the acronyms that are used in the Internet and the Arabic media are borrowed from English and other global languages without translation, while most others are translated into Arabic and written in their full form without using acronyms. In addition, using the same way of creating acronyms in English, many Arabic agencies use English and/or Arabic acronyms to refer to their agencies names.

## 5 Data Collection

This section deals with collection of the data. Two diagnostic tests have been constructed and applied to students of the Department of English as well as those of the Arabic one so as to unearth the difficulties these students face in manipulating this process. Due to the fact that English and

Arabic are two different languages, the researchers make two tests for each department dealing with the same process (i.e. acronymy) in each language.

Both of the tests are composed of two questions (see Appendices I and III). For both departments, the students are asked in the first question (Q.1) to give the origin of the given acronyms. In the second question (Q.2), the students are required to construct acronyms from the given set of words. Q.1 consists of fifteen items in common with Q.2.

Some of the items of both tests are taken from ***The Origin and Development of the English Language*** by Thomas Pyles (1971), ***English Word-Formation*** by Laurie Bauer (1983), ***A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*** by Randolph Quirk; Sidney Greenbaum; Geoffrey Leech and Jan Svartvik (1985), ***Linguistic Meaning*** by Keith Allan (1986), ***NTC's Dictionary of Acronyms and Abbreviations*** by Steven Kleinedler (1993), ***اتجاهات اللغة الفصحى وعلاقتها باللهجات*** by جودت منصور (1996), ***ɛ ǚ ȁ ĦĀǚ الحديثة في وسائل الإعلام بين الترجمة العربية والاقتراض المعجمي*** by محمود فهمي حجازي (2000), ***An Introduction to Language*** by Victoria Fromkin; Robert Rodman and Nina Hyams (2003), ***The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*** by David Crystal (2004), ***The Study of Language*** by George Yule (2006), and ***Acronyms in Arabic from Wikipedia*** (2009 a). The subjects have studied this topic in the second year of the study in Stageberg's (1981) ***An Introductory English Grammar***.

## 6 Data Analysis

This section is concerned with the analyses of errors committed by the students of both departments. It also shows the reasons behind their errors.

The following table shows the subjects' performance of Q.1:

Table (1)

**Subjects' Achievement of the First Question at the Department of English**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 28 | 28 | 72 | 72 |
| 2 | 4 | 4 | 96 | 96 |
| 3 | 5 | 5 | 95 | 95 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 96 | 96 |
| 5 | 4 | 4 | 96 | 96 |
| 6 | 5 | 5 | 95 | 95 |
| 7 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| 8 | 6 | 6 | 94 | 94 |
| 9 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| 10 | 15 | 15 | 85 | 85 |
| 11 | 6 | 6 | 94 | 94 |
| 12 | 22 | 22 | 78 | 78 |
| 13 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| 14 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 15 | 4 | 4 | 96 | 96 |
| Total | 114 | 7.6 | 1386 | 92.4 |

It is clear from the items above that the subjects face real difficulties in identifying the origins of the given acronyms. For this reason, the total number of their correct responses (114, 7.6%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (1386, 92.4%). This verifies the hypothesis which reads: **Students at the Department of English are unable to identify the original words from which the acronyms are constructed.**

Table (2)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Second Question at the Department of English**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 65 | 65 | 35 | 35 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 47 | 47 | 53 | 53 |
| 3 | 65 | 65 | 35 | 35 |
| 4 | 35 | 35 | 65 | 65 |
| 5 | 25 | 25 | 75 | 75 |
| 6 | 42 | 42 | 58 | 58 |
| 7 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 8 | 68 | 68 | 32 | 32 |
| 9 | 43 | 43 | 57 | 57 |
| 10 | 51 | 51 | 49 | 49 |
| 11 | 63 | 63 | 37 | 37 |
| 12 | 53 | 53 | 47 | 47 |
| 13 | 53 | 53 | 47 | 47 |
| 14 | 59 | 59 | 41 | 41 |
| 15 | 37 | 37 | 63 | 63 |
| Total | 708 | 47.2 | 792 | 52.8 |

From the results above, the total number of the correct responses (708, 47.2%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (792, 52.8%). This indicates that they encounter difficulties in constructing acronyms.

Table (3)

**Subjects' Achievement of the First Question at the Department of Arabic**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 15 | 15 | 85 | 85 |
| 2 | 5 | 5 | 95 | 95 |
| 3 | 87 | 87 | 13 | 13 |
| 4 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 5 | 74 | 74 | 26 | 26 |
| 6 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 7 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 8 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 9 | 6 | 6 | 94 | 94 |
| 10 | 5 | 5 | 95 | 95 |
| 11 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| 13 | 3 | 3 | 97 | 97 |
| 14 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 15 | 1 | 1 | 99 | 99 |
| Total | 212 | 14.13 | 1288 | 85.87 |

It is obvious that the total number of their incorrect responses (1288, 85.87%) is more than that of the correct ones (212, 14.13%). This is a clear indication that the students at the Department of Arabic face real difficulties in producing acronyms. This validates the fourth hypothesis which states: **Students at the Department of Arabic are incapable of recognizing the original words from which the acronyms are constructed.**

Table (4)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Second Question at the Department of Arabic**

| No. of Item | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 37 | 37 | 63 | 63 |
| 2 | 26 | 26 | 74 | 74 |
| 3 | 54 | 54 | 46 | 46 |
| 4 | 21 | 21 | 79 | 79 |
| 5 | 12 | 12 | 88 | 88 |
| 6 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 7 | 17 | 17 | 83 | 83 |
| 8 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 9 | 4 | 4 | 96 | 96 |
| 10 | 2 | 2 | 98 | 98 |
| 11 | 20 | 20 | 80 | 80 |
| 12 | 12 | 12 | 88 | 88 |
| 13 | 46 | 46 | 54 | 54 |
| 14 | 22 | 22 | 78 | 78 |
| 15 | 6 | 6 | 94 | 94 |
| Total | 283 | 18.87 | 1217 | 81.13 |

From the table above, the total number of their incorrect responses (1217, 81.13%) is more than that of the correct ones (283, 18.87%). This denotes that the students at the Department of Arabic face real difficulties in constructing acronyms. This verifies the fifth hypothesis which states: **They are bad at producing acronyms.**

The following table shows the subjects' achievement in the whole test.

Table (5)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Whole Test at the Department of English**

| No of Question | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q.1 | 114 | 7.6 | 1386 | 92.4 |
| Q.2 | 708 | 47.2 | 792 | 52.8 |
| Total | 822 | 27.4 | 2178 | 72.6 |

From Table (5), it is intelligible that subjects' total performance at the Department of English in Q.2 is better than their performance at Q.1. This harmonizes with the hypothesis: **The achievement of the students at the Department of English in constructing acronyms is much better than producing the original words of the acronyms**.

Table (6)

**Subjects' Achievement of the Whole Test at the Department of Arabic**

| No of Question | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q.1 | 212 | 14.13 | 1288 | 85.87 |
| Q.2 | 283 | 18.87 | 1217 | 81.13 |
| Total | 495 | 16.5 | 2505 | 83.5 |

From Table (6), it is apparent that the students encounter real difficulties in both Q.1 and Q.2 as the total number of the incorrect responses (2505, 83.5%) is more than that of the correct ones (495, 16.5%).

The following table shows the subjects' total achievement at both departments.

Table (7)

**Subjects' Total Achievement at both Departments**

| Department | No. of Correct Responses | % | No. of Incorrect Responses | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 822 | 27.4 | 2178 | 72.6 |
| Arabic | 495 | 16.5 | 2505 | 83.5 |
| Total | 1317 | 21.95 | 4683 | 78.05 |

Actually, it is clear that the total achievement of the students at the Department of English is better than that of the Department of Arabic. This proves the fourth hypothesis: **The performance of the students at the Department of English is better than the performance of the students at the Department of Arabic**.

## 7 Sources of Errors

All learners commit errors and errors are natural processes for language learning. This section deals with the reasons beyond students' errors. In both of the departments in this study, most errors are attributed to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning and communication strategies.

**7.1 Interlingual Transfer:** This type of error happens owing to the effect of the learners' first language into the foreign one.

This sort of error can be seen in items (6),(8) and (13) of Q.1.

Item (6): FAQ = * Formation Automobile Question

Item (8): FYI = *Foundation Year Institution

Item (13): WAR = *Wealth Automatic Revolution

The reasons behind students' errors are that acronymy is not used on a wide scale in Arabic. Moreover, Arab linguists have not focused or elaborated on this process in the books of linguistics because they envisage that this concept is not Arabic in origin (i.e. it is borrowed from foreign languages like English and French).

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the interlingual transfer is (108, 4.96%).

**7.2 Intralingual Transfer:** This sort of errors occurs due to of the target language on itself, (Penny, 2001: 8-9).

Intralingual errors encompass the following:

**Overgeneralization error**: is a form of negative transfer which involves the incorrect application of the previously learned second language material to a present second language context (Ellis,1986:171).

**Ignorance of rule restriction:** the learners apply a rule on a category which is in incorrect place that leads to error committing (Richards and Sampson, 1974:70).

**Incomplete application of the rules**: It involves the inability to learn more complex types of structures because the learner thinks that he can achieve effective communication by using relatively simple rules (Brown, 1987:8-3).

(Richards and Schmidt, 2002:185) **false concepts hypothesized** that may derive from wrong comprehension of a distinction in the target language (Brown, 1987: 81-3 and Chanier et al., 1992: 134).

Overgeneralization and false concept hypothesized errors appear in items (4), (7) and (9) of Q.2.

Item (4): Male or Female = *MF

Item (7): Paraaminobenzoic acid = *PA

Item (9) Self-contained underwater breathing apparatus = *Suba

From the items above, it is obvious that the students overgeneralize the rule thinking that they can construct acronyms only by taking the initial letters of the original principal words. They do not discern that some acronyms are constructed in a reversed way.

In complete application of the rules can be emerged items (2), (3) and (15).

Item (2): Army of the republic of Vietnam. *ARV

Item (3): Global horizontal sounding technique: *GHST

Item (15): potassium rare earth elements phosphate: *PREEP

It is clear from the items above, that some symbols or letters may be added to acronyms, together with the initial letters that construct the acronyms for the easiness of enunciation. The students of both departments commit mistakes in punctuation. For instance, some of the subjects at the Department of English write capital letters for the acronyms in lieu of small ones and vice versa.

Some of the errors in items (4) and (12) of Q.2 may be attributed to ignorance of rules restrictions.

Item (4): Male or female = *MLFL

Item (12): Old Kinderhook = *Old hook

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the intralingual transfer is (1117, 51.29%).

**7.3 Context of Learning:** This type of error occurs due to (Brown, 1987: 179).

With regard to the students of the Department of English, the instructors do not focus on this process and they do not give enough examples and exercises about acronyms as well as the books. Also, the textbooks followed are old-fashioned and they cannot keep up with the recent huge amounts of acronyms especially those ones that are used nowadays in the Internet.

On the other hand, Arab instructors and textbook writers do not involve this process of word formation in their syllabi though acronymy does exist in Arabic and it is widely used nowadays.

This sort of errors can be seen in item (1) of Q.1 of the Arabic test and item (1)of Q.1 of the English one.

الفقرة (1): حماس = * حركة حماس

Item (1): NATO = *National Organization State

The total number of errors that are possibly due to the context of learning is (428, 19.65%) of the total number of the subjects' errors, whereas the total number of errors that are related to Students of the Arabic Department is (1600, 63.87%).

**7.4 Communication Strategies:** In this section, we look at some of the communication strategies which the learners have been observed to use.

**Avoidance:** Learners sometimes eschew the items which they perceive to be difficult for them (Lightbown and Spada, 2003: 75).

Avoidance errors can be found in item (7), (9), (13) and (14) of Q.1, item (7) of Q.2.

Item (7): NASA

Item (9): BTW

Item (13): WAR

Item (14): MBC

Item (7): Paraaminobenzoic acid

In the same way, the same type of error can be found in item (4), (6), (7), (8), (11), (12), (13), (14) and (15) of Q.1 and items (6), (8) and (10) of Q.2 of the Arabic test.

الفقرة (4): حدس الفقرة (6): دالمو الفقرة (7): مشمش الفقرة (8): ق.ع الفقرة (11): اه
الفقرة (12): اش ا الفقرة (13): كوميسا الفقرة (14): جات الفقرة (15) : اب ا.

الفقرة (6): وكالة الأنباء السودانية الفقرة (8): قوة محمولة جوية الفقرة (10): منظمة العمل الديمقراطي.

**Creating New Words** or **Coinage**: The learner may construct or invent new words or phrases so as to express the desired idea (Faucette, 2001: 15).

Coinage errors appear in item (5) of Q.2.

Item (5): What you see is what you get = * WSW

Coinage errors appear also in items (9) and (15) of Q.2

الفقرة (9) : زيادة الزيادات = * زال

الفقرة (15): حركة تحرير فلسطين = * ح ت فلس

The reason behind using coinage is that the students of both departments do not know acronymy very well. For this reason, they resort to create new words.

The total number of errors that may be related to using such strategies is (525, 24.1%) of the total number of the subjects' errors, whereas the total number of errors that are related to students of the Arabic Department is (905, 36.13%).

## 8 Conclusions

In the light of the students' responses, it can be concluded that:

1. Iraqi EFL university students at the Department of English face real difficulties in knowing the words from which acronyms are constructed. For this reason, the total number of their correct responses (114, 7.6%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (1386, 92.4%). This verifies the second hypothesis.
2. Most of them can easily construct acronyms but they face more difficulties in discerning the words from which acronyms are constructed. Subjects' total performance at the Department of English in Q.2 is better than their performance at Q.1. This harmonizes with the third hypothesis.
3. The total achievement of the students at the Department of English is better than that of the Department of Arabic. This proves the fourth hypothesis.
4. There are three sorts of errors committed by the sample of the study. These errors can be summarized as follows:
   a- Incorrect production of the acronyms.
   b- Wrong identification of the origin of the acronyms
   b- Giving no answer.
5. The subjects' errors have been attributed to the following factors:
   I. Interlingual transfer, whereby Arab linguists do not focus or elaborate on this process. This type of error constitutes (4.96%) for the students at the Department of English.
   II. Intralingual transfer, whereby the subjects use their prior knowledge of the target language. This type of error constitutes (51.29 %) for the students at the Department of English.

III.. Context of Learning, as little attention has been paid to such process by textbook writers and instructors. This sort of error constitutes (19.65 %), whereas the total number of errors that are related to Students of the Arabic Department is (63.87%).

IV. Communication strategies which are selected by the subjects to fill the gap of their knowledge. This type of error constitutes (24.1 %) whereas the total number of errors that are related to students of the Arabic Department is (36.13%).

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http://www.almohandes.org/vb/showthread.php?t=778 - 52k

# Appendix I

## The Test of the Department of English

**Q.1 Give the origin of the following acronyms:**

1. NATO 2. BASIC 3. WFP 4. PIN 5. CIA 6. FAQ 7. NASA 8. FYI 9. BTW 10. laser 11. radar 12. UNESCO 13. WAR 14. MBC 15. NEGRO.

**Q.2 Give the acronym for each of the following points:**

1. Erasable programmable read-only memory (          )
2. Army of the republic of Vietnam (          )
3. Global horizontal sounding technique (          )
4. Male or female (          )
5. What you see is what you get (          )
6. Federation of inter-state truckers (          )
7. Paraaminobenzoic acid (          )
8. Military police (          )
9. Self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (          )
10. Intercontinental ballistic missile (          )
11. General purpose (          )
12. Old kinderhook (          )
13. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (          )
14. Belguim Netherlands Luxembourg (          )
15. Potassium rare earth elements phosphate (          )

# Appendix II
# The Answers of the Test

**Answers of Q.1:**

1- North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
2- Beginners All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code.
3- World Food Programme.
4- Personal Identity Number.
5- Central Intelligence Agency.
6- Frequently Asked Question.
7- National Aeronautics and Space Administration.
8- For your information.
9- By the way.
10- Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation.
11- Radio detecting and ranging.
12- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.
13- Women Against Rape.
14- Middle East Broadcasting Corporation.
15- National Economic Growth and Reconstruction Organization.

**Answers of Q.2:**

1- EPROM 2- Arvin 3- GHOST 4- MORF 5- WYSIWYG 6- FIST 7- PABA 8- MP 9- Scuba 10- ICBM 11- jeep or GP 12- OK 13- SARS 14- BNL 15- KREEP.

# Appendix III

## The Test of the Department of Arabic

**س١ / اكتب أصل كل من الألفاظ الاوائلية الآتية:**

١- حماس ٢- واخ ٣- أ.م.د. ٤- حدس ٥- الخ ٦- دالمو ٧- مشمش ٨- ق. ع ٩- واع
١٠ - وفا ١١- أ هـ ١٢- أش ا ١٣- كوميسا ١٤- جات ١٥- أب ا

**س٢/ أكتب اللفظة الأوائلية الدالة على كل مما يأتي:**

١- بدون تاريخ

٢- حركة اليسار الديمقراطي

٣- مقاومة طائرات

٤- جمع جمع الجمع

٥- موسى بن ميمون

٦- وكالة الأنباء السودانية

٧- الترقيم الدولي الموحد للكتب

٨- قوة محمولة جوية

٩- زيادة الزيادات

١٠- منظمة العمل الديمقراطي

١١- ذات مسؤولية محدودة

١٢- أفواج المقاومة اللبنانية

١٣- وهو المطلوب

١٤- سوق تجاري

١٥- حركة تحرير فلسطين

# Appendix IV
# The Answers of the Test

**Answers of Q.1:**

١- حركة المقاومة الإسلامية.

٢- وكالة أنباء الخليج.

٣- أستاذ مساعد دكتور.

٤- الحركة الدستورية الإسلامية.

٥- إلى أخره.

٦- دار المؤمنين.

٧- المنظمة الشيوعية المصرية.

٨- قطاع عام.

٩- وكالة الإنباء العراقية.

١٠- وكالة فلسطين الإنباء.

١١- انتهى

١٢- أنباء الشرق الأوسط.

١٣- السوق المشترك لدول شرق و جنوب إفريقيا.

١٤- الاتفاقية العامة عن التعريفات الجمركية والتجارة.

١٥- وكالة الإنباء العالمية Associated Press International .

**Answers of Q.2:**

١- ب.ت ٢- حيد ٣- م.ط ٤- ج ج ج ٥- رمبم ٦- سونا ٧- تدمك ٨- جولقة ٩- تت

١٠- دعم ١١- ذ.م.م ١٢- امل ١٣- و.هـ.م. ١٤- س. ت ١٥- فتح